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I have been reading about medieval interpretations of the Orpheus myth. Orpheus is typically portrayed as having the ability to control the animal realm (and also sometimes plants and trees) through his music, and so I was curious to revisit various versions of the story in light of some of the ideas we have explored in this course. I was also curious to learn more about the versions of the story that adapt Orpheus for Christian audiences (including the Testament of Orpheus, which was Orpheus’s supposed profession of monotheistic faith) and how medieval Christian interpretations analyze Orpheus’s relationship to the animal realm.

There is a wealth of material about medieval analyses and retellings of the Orpheus story, so I have been trying to narrow down my scope. I’m focusing on two poems: the anonymous 14th-century romance *Sir Orfeo* and Robert Henryson’s 15th-century version of Orpheus and Eurydice. I am interested in the human-animal relationships in *Sir Orfeo*, and particularly whether the nature of Orpheus’s relationship to animals changes in this version because King Orfeo does not descend into the underworld, but rather travels through the woods into a strange otherworld. When I reread *Sir Orfeo* in the context of this course, I also noticed several other relevant themes—for example, King Orfeo becomes a bearded, ragged wild man in the middle of the poem as he disappears into the woods. When he returns to the court, he looks so wild that he is unrecognizable to his former servants, and so he attempts to convince his deputy that the king was killed by beasts in the woods.

In Henryson’s poem, I was particularly curious about the transfer of musical ability to Orpheus and the natural and intellectual traits that combine to create Orpheus’s powerful music. I was also curious about the depiction of the underworld in Henryson’s version and the beasts and monsters he describes, all of which are subdued by Orpheus’s music.

Both *Sir Orfeo* and Henryson’s *Orpheus and Eurydice* are discussed in depth in the final chapter of *Orpheus in the Middle Ages*, by John Block Friedman (Harvard University Press, 1970). Freidman places the two poems in the context of previous interpretations of the myth. For the purposes of this paper, I would like to focus on one particular topic: Orpheus’s ability to control animals through music.

Henryson’s version of the Orpheus story is related to Boethius’s explanation of the myth, and I would like to explore the connection between Henryson’s depiction of Orpheus and Boethius’s *De institutione musica*.

I also found that some of the readings for our recent classes have made me curious to explore the Orpheus story in a contemporary theoretical context. As a result, I have been trying, and struggling a bit, to incorporate some of Thacker’s ideas into my paper. Particularly, I would like to challenge Thacker’s ideas about horror. It seemed that Thacker was tying horror stories to human beings’ fear of the natural world, the enormity of the natural world and its apparent indifference to human life. I believe the Orpheus story, and particularly the relationship Orpheus brings to bear over the natural world through his music, presents an interesting counterpoint to the horror conception of the underworld that Thacker describes.